

America's New CMO needs to Reposition Brand USA Abroad

Now that the U.S. has a new CMO for the country — yes, Hillary Clinton — it's time to consider the essentials that are hopefully on her agenda in order to win back the indifferent "customers" around the world who've been downgrading Brand USA in favor of more sympathetic nations under better organizational leadership over the past 8 years.

As Secretary of State, her role — like those before her — essentially involves researching the market by canvassing opinions of other world leaders about their "brand experience," promoting the American point-of-view ("brand personality"), marketing the desirability of our entrepreneurial business culture to potential inward investors ("service support"), all the while demonstrating diplomacy when challenged by opposing opinions ("testing the marketing plan"). It's a tough job, but a critical one now more than ever before.

From the perspective of many national leaders and consumers around the world, the US model of capitalism appears to be broken, needing urgent (but thoughtful) repair before it is re-exported to other parts of the world. Over the past 20 years in Europe — based on my direct experience of living and working in one of its most dynamic hubs, London — our public diplomacy scorecard has been steadily worsening as have perceptions that the US is an ethical, reliable, honest and admirable place in which to do business.

As evidence on top of the plethora of research findings of this decline in goodwill — including the studies by New York's Business for Diplomatic Action (full disclosure: I sit on the Senior Advisory Board of this organization) — an initiative was launched this past November by 17 of America's largest companies including Wal-Mart, General Electric, PepsiCo, Dell, United Airlines and Accenture to improve American business' ethical standards to stop the decline in our public opinion. Not only is this an issue for US corporates overseas but also at home where executives fly private jets to begging meetings on Capitol (Capital?) Hill. This Business Ethics Leadership Alliance from the Ethisphere Institute has members sign up to four principles including not paying bribes; avoiding conflict of interests and increased accountability.

Secretary Clinton should take a leaf from the professional marketer's book in deploying approaches that ensure businesses around the world are re-engaged to trade with us and invest in our economy. The "Four P's of Marketing" needing her most urgent attention are:

Price: in terms of needless time wasted and stress, remove the hassle factor we force the rest of the world to go through by managing the overly-long lines at our airports and borders. You may not be aware that your international colleagues now have yet another hoop to jump

through if they want to come to the US (and they'll really, really have to want to come!) which is the Electronic System Travel Authorisation (ESTA) visa waiver for pre-travel clearance, thanks to our marketing-friendly friends at The Department of Homeland Security. This now replaces the lovely green cards traditionally received on the plane, which all visitors need to obtain more than 24 hours before departure. So any urgent, short-notice meetings you were planning to have involving your overseas colleagues — well, you can forget those now.

Product: fix the model of capitalism to be one that's more transparent and ethical, which is already underway by the private sector with the birth of the Business Ethics Leadership Alliance;

Promotion: raise the level of investment in those already in, and being recruited for, the diplomatic corps by improving their training about the rest of the world, including business cultures. Trust them and give them the freedom to act on-the-ground and be true "first responders" without the traditional HQ micro-management so they can influence their target markets in more effective ways

Place: broaden the points of presence where international business people can access American products, services and business culture in open, not protectionist, climates

Clearly our new CMO has her work cut out, but a few early fixes by her and her team can win back the international loyalty, goodwill and spending our economy rightly deserves. America invented professional marketing — now let's demonstrate we know how to use it.



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